



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

JORDANIAN MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO CONSPIRACY TO SMUGGLE ALIENS INTO THE UNITED STATES FROM THE MIDDLE EAST

WASHINGTON, D.C. - A Jordanian man has pleaded guilty to participating in a conspiracy to smuggle illegal aliens from Iraq and Jordan into the United States, Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney Kenneth L. Wainstein of the District of Columbia, and Acting Assistant Secretary John P. Clark of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) at the Department of Homeland Security announced today.

Thaer Omran Ismail Asaifi, also known as Abu Harp, entered his guilty plea late yesterday at U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, before Judge Rosemary M. Collyer. Asaifi, 35, admitted to participating in a conspiracy, headed by his wife - naturalized American citizen Neeran Hakim Zaia, of Sterling Heights, Michigan - from early 2001 through September 2004 to illegally smuggle scores of Iraqi and Jordanian nationals into the United States through Ecuador and Peru for profit.

Under the terms of the plea agreement it is expected that Asaifi will face a prison sentence of six to eight years, following which he will be deported. Sentencing is scheduled for May 2006.

"Today's guilty plea represents an important milestone in the three-year ICE undercover investigation known as Operation Tortuga, which targeted a human smuggling organization that moved individuals from the Middle East into the United States for profit. ICE owes a special debt of gratitude to Peruvian authorities who provided critical assistance in combating this criminal syndicate," said ICE Acting Assistant Secretary Clark.

"The Department of Justice is committed to protecting our citizens against the serious security threat posed by human smuggling organizations," said Assistant Attorney General Fisher. "These criminals facilitate the fraudulent and clandestine entry into the United States of unknown foreign individuals, putting the security of our borders at risk."

"Human smugglers make their living by circumventing our immigration laws and taking advantage of foreigners seeking a new life in America. These criminals pose a serious risk to our national security, and we will prosecute them to the full extent of the law," said U.S. Attorney Wainstein.

The charges arise from an extraterritorial undercover investigation that was initiated and led by the Washington Field Office of the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), with the substantial assistance of personnel and resources from ICE's Detroit, Michigan Office; the ICE Attache Office in Peru; the Peruvian National Police; and Peruvian Immigration authorities. The State Department's Diplomatic Security Service also assisted with the investigation.

The case is being jointly prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Bruce R. Hegyi of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia and Jim U. Oliver Jr., Senior Trial Attorney with the Domestic Security Section of the Criminal Division at the U.S. Department of Justice.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.